

Where to find articles

By Kristopher Augsburger

When building up an extemp box students often find it difficult to decide what to put into their box. Too often when someone getting started is looking for newspapers or periodicals to purchase they are often “shocked and awed” by big names of newspapers. Everyone assumes that they simply have to have the New York Times or the Washington Post. We all have limited budgets and today more than ever it is difficult to get enough money to buy all the periodicals we might want.

Accordingly students need to evaluate what sources give them the best bang for the buck. The most basic necessity for any box is a good newspaper. The choice of a newspaper is important. You don't want a paper that won't provide you very many quality articles to add to your box. Most local newspapers generally are not up to the task when it comes to providing good coverage of national events and commentary. Many smaller newspapers concentrate on local issues that are unlikely to be of any use for your box. Bigger isn't always better however. If you live in Los Angeles it doesn't make any sense to order a subscription to the New York Times. The subscriptions for national edition newspapers are typically more expensive than they are in their local distribution area. Additionally the Los Angeles Times is an excellent quality paper in it's own right and will provide a good amount of information. If you have a lot of money to burn you can buy the additional paper but don't feel that you have all the biggest papers to be complete.

The Big 3(ie. Time, Newsweek, and US News and World Report)

These for better or worse often are the mainstay of many an extemp's box. They are decent general news magazines but don't expect to find a lot of in depth. My former coach once said that these magazines are good for finding out body counts. Time will tell you how many people died last week in Iraq but often does a poor job of telling you why. Another problem that these magazines face is that they tend to try to target such a general audience that they tend to simplify issues so that they can be digested for the masses. Use these for keeping on what is generally going on in the world but try to avoid relying on these as your only periodicals.

Electronic Databases

While databases like Lexis-Nexis frequently have costs that exceed many peoples budgets I would be remiss to not mention them. The primary advantage that these databases have over buying traditional paper newspapers and periodicals is that they are very good when you are trying to find information about a particular topic. These databases also provide you access to the text to many newspapers at a fraction of the cost of subscribing. There are two disadvantages to these databases. Lexis-Nexis, which I am most familiar with, doesn't allow one to browse through articles. If you don't know what you are looking for you will never find anything. Another disadvantage is that you sometimes lose parts of the original article. Photographs, graphs, charts, and sometimes even tables are omitted. The powers that

have had difficulties reproducing these things and if they were available the databases would probably be even more expensive.

Despite these disadvantages electronic databases can be an excellent resource for those who have the money and have to time to search for new articles.

So when you are looking for add more spice to your extemp box remember to try to think outside the box.

This is the first part in a continuing series.